

The Edgy-catin Mama  
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EVERETT WA 982 OCT 26

# *The Edgy-catin' Mama*

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This zine is dedicated to my Grandma, Vera Packebush, for always being there to cheer me on and for constantly harping on me with "You should write that down you know." Happy 81st birthday grandma!

#### Some Disorganized Thoughts from the Editor

The Edgy-catin' Mama is a self-published feminist homeschooling zine. It is also an affordable form of therapy for me, and hopefully for you too. As a feminist homeschooling mom, who is sometimes grumpy, frustrated and tired I often times found that the other homeschooling publications out there did not speak to me. Sure I love, and depend on, Home Education magazine and Growing Without Schooling but often I come away from reading them feeling like everyone else has perfect little, self-motivated genius children. It sometimes seemed that all of the other homeschooling mothers in the world are always smiling and every moment is a teachable moment to them. In my house some moments are wonderful, magical, teachable moments but many other moments are teeth grinding, blood pressure rising, chaos filled, just-try-to-get-through-it-alive moments.

I know I am not alone in this and I wanted to find my village. I wanted to find my village of feminist, homeschooling (this includes ALL methods of homeschooling and alternative education) outside-the-mainstream mamas who were tired of living behind the everything-is-perfect mask. I wanted to connect with women who were not afraid of a little honesty. So the Edgy-catin' Mama was born.

When I started this venture I envisioned an edgy, raw, homemade publication. I wanted honesty and reality. As more and more people started to request my zine I began to change my vision a bit. I decided that maybe it needed to be a bit more professional looking, maybe a little less harsh, maybe a few more warm fuzzies. As time passed though, I have returned to my original vision: homemade and real. I am sure this will offend some, but that is ok. Hopefully, while it may offend a few, it will also help others who are struggling and feeling inadequate in this huge and wonderful homeschooling adventure.

This is my zine and so I will make it what I want it to be. Each issue will be a bit different than the one before. Sometimes you might run across a cuss word, because in my happy homeschool house they are at times mumbled. Some stories will be about those perfect days and others will be about those horrible, I-am-a-complete-failure-as-a-mom days. You will most likely find typos and an occasional grammar or punctuation mistake. Staring at the same writing day after day I will miss things, plus I am terrible at punctuation so please forgive me. If anyone out there would like to work for absolutely no pay as an assistant editor give me a shout. You are hired.

I am eager to hear your stories. If you have a tip, hint, rant, vent, day-in-the-life, ramble, essay, or article that you would like to submit please send it in the body of an email to: [npackebush@aol.com](mailto:npackebush@aol.com). No attachments please. Please keep in mind that The Edgy-catin' Mama is not a place to bash the public schools or to debate which homeschooling method is the best method. It is, however, a safe place for ALL feminist homeschooling mamas. You will be rewarded with 4 free copies of the issue you are published in and a generous bio that can include info on your business or service. If you would like to subscribe to the Edgy-catin' Mama please send \$8 for a year subscription (4 issues) or \$2 for one issue to: Nina Packebush, 903 Dyer Rd, Sultan WA 98294. Make your check or money order out to Nina Packebush NOT The Edgy-catin' Mama. If you are really strapped right now but would still like to receive this zine then just drop me a note telling me you are strapped and I will send you a copy anyway. The only catch is that if you win the lottery you have to promise to buy me a coffee press and a pound of strong, fair trade, organic coffee...or a new car, I am flexible.

Cheers,  
Nina

Snippets from our happy home school...

In our home we have many nicknames for each other. Here are a few of the names my kids have for me:

Jason calls me Grumpus, Homey G (G stands for Grumpus) and G (again stands for Grumpus)

Hailey calls me Mumsy, Mothergoose and Master

Sydney calls me Mamaduck (to this I must call her Daisy) and Mumsy

All of the kids also call me The Soup Goddess (ok I make them call me this whenever I make soup but I do make really good soup)



With any luck the next issue (due out in January) will include:

- Stories from grown home/unschoolers
- Radical Unschooling Q&A
- Wilderness Awareness Community School-the greatest school ever.
- A day in the life and much more.

Deadline for submissions is December 15th, but the earlier the better!

Photos are welcome but please email me for info on sending photos.

[npackebush@aol.com](mailto:npackebush@aol.com)

To subscribe be sure to send check or money order (\$8 per year or \$2 per issue) to:

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Our Trip  
by Hailey Packebush-Franko

We were going to Texas. I was kind of excited, but not really. I was worried about my animals and I didn't want to fly. We were finally on the plane and the pilot gives the weather, it was 85 in Texas at 8:00 at night. OK so that wasn't so bad, except it was 8:00 at night and I was wearing baggy pants, a tank top and a wool snow-boarding hat. I thought I was going to die!

The plane finally landed. It seemed like it took forever for the plane to land, especially with Sydney, my little sister, talking the whole time. When we got off the plane my grandpa, step-grandma and 15 year-old brother were waiting. My grandpa was wearing a cowboy hat, birkenstocks, cut-offs and a T-shirt. He thinks he looks like a cowboy. My step-grandma and brother looked embarrassed, probably because grandpa was jumping up and down waving his arms.

We got our bags and headed outside. It was like being in an oven soaking wet. It was awful. We got to the house and it was like a mansion - stone floors, wood framed glass cabinets, wood floors and it was big. If you go outside you have to worry about fire ants. They were everywhere and there were toads everywhere too. It is also as flat as flat could be - no mountains, no hills and the trees were really small.

I didn't really like Texas. I liked visiting my grandpa and Lori but Texas just wasn't my kind of place. I liked the horses, the hot tub and the neighbor's pool. We did a lot of fun stuff, but I was ready to go home. It was Tuesday when we were going home. We were at the gate and everything was ready. I was very excited, we were going home...or were we?

We were right there at the gate. My mom and I went to use the bathrooms and we walked by a TV. When we saw the Pentagon it was on fire and there was smoke everywhere. The sound was turned off. We didn't have time to watch, we walked back to where we were sitting and my grandma called and said 2 planes hit the World Trade Center Twin Towers, 1 hit the Pentagon and one was missing. She said they were high-jacked by terrorists. We were walking onto the plane when a man walked off, with his cell phone, and said his friend called and said the airports were closing. The ticket person said it wasn't, the man insisted it was.

So our flight ended up being canceled and the airport was shut down. We went to get our bags, it took forever. While we were waiting we booked another flight for the next day, we really didn't have any idea what had happened. We got our bags and left. When we got back to grandpas and saw CNN, it was very, very scary. I was glad we didn't get on that plane. We ended up staying another week because our flights were canceled. We considered driving, especially when we heard that two men with box cutters, hair dye and plane tickets were pulled off a train right there in Fort Worth. I didn't want to fly. I would have rather walked.

I enjoyed the last week, but we didn't do a whole lot. It was kind of a stressful week.

We finally got home and now everything is back to normal. I am glad to be home and our flight went well. I was very nervous to fly, but once we were in the air it was fine. Well that pretty much sums it up.

The Science of Laundry

by Mary Lamken

It's interesting what you learn when you homeschool 7 children. To be more accurate, unschool 7 children. One of the lessons is a no-brainer: Laundry never ends. Ahhh, but the lessons learned sorting laundry, THAT is truly amazing.

Sorting through my 5 year olds laundry is always an exciting thing. A bountiful science lesson in every load. One such lesson, I was reminded of this week. As I was sorting through her things, I came across her knit top - you know, the kind with ribs? Stuck in the ribs of this top were some dandelion "wishes". My mind drifted back to a few days before when we were blowing dandelion wishes (yes, our neighbors love us). The blowing of the wishes sparked conversation about seeds.

We discussed how the "wishes" are seeds and when we blow them, they float in the air to land in a new place. We talked about how dandelions will grow from that seed and provide us with new "Wishes" to blow. We also talked about how the neighbors would not be so thrilled about the "wishes".

I picked up another shirt, and there it was, a grass stain on the back - Spray and Wash is my friend. Again, my mind thought back to that same week. Lying in the grass, looking up at the "helicopters" - thousands of them, that currently adorn the Maple Tree so large and generously providing shade. We talked about the "helicopters" and how, when they are just the right readiness, they will float to earth to become little maple trees. That birds will eat some of them, some will land in yards where the lawn mowers will get them, some on the cement, where the street sweeper will. Still others will land in the perfect spot, on the side of our house, where they will sprout and become little Maple Tree Saplings. I didn't tell her

that Daddy would rip them out soon after they sprouted to protect the house from the large tree that it could become. Every year we pull up 10 to 20 saplings. We talked about the rain and wind and sun and all the things needed to make the seeds turn into trees. Well - all of this remembering isn't getting the laundry done, now is it?

Where is that shirt? The white one with the peach stains. Ahhh, here it is. Oh my - that was a week, wasn't it? Jessica was on a roll. She came to me with the "pit" wrapped in her shirt. "Mom, this is the peach pit - is it a seed too?"

Well - you got it, we explored the workings of a peach pit, why we couldn't grow a peach tree from that particular pit, talked about our weather, and the kind of weather peaches like, the kind of weather we get, etc. I hunt down the pictures of our family picking peaches, and we open a jar of canned peaches from that trip last year. Ahhh, that was a nice day with my somewhat hyper daughter. She made the connection during the Peach Conversation that the wishes, the helicopters and the pits were all seeds. All different, but all important.

Yep, there is Science in the Laundry. This week it was Botany. Next week? Well, I'm hoping it isn't about exploring the invertebrates the fit into pockets. I know Jessica will lead me to something though, and she'll learn and grow and understand that life and learning go hand in hand, and what a nice way it is to teach mommy a few things.

Sydney falling asleep on  
Mt. Laundry... a permanent  
fixture in our home





## Radical Unschooling

By Valerie Fützenreiter

You can lead a child to a textbook, but you cannot force her to learn. The desire to learn is inherent in most people from birth. If a child is given the freedom to learn at her own pace, she will continue learning as she did from infancy. It is a common misconception that the only things that children can learn naturally are walking and talking, but in reality many things can be absorbed naturally. Unschooling is child-led learning. The child decides what she will study, when she will study and if she will study. Radical unschooling gives the child free reign over her life, allowing her to make decisions about everything that concerns her. There are no forced bedtimes, no room-cleaning rules, and no punishment/reward systems. The child is not manipulated to perform according to the standards of a school board.

Unschooling is not about teaching children as much as it is about embracing a respectful and friendly coexistence between parents and children. Radical unschooling allows the child to mature naturally and without the unquestioned expectations that are forced upon most children through authoritative parenting and forced learning. It is impossible to live our lives totally free of obstacles, but to put unnecessary obstacles in the lives of our children as they mature only serves to frustrate them and delay their smooth arrival into responsible adulthood.

We are all unique individuals learning at our own pace, pursuing those things that interest us with motivation that is inside of us. If children are allowed to do this from birth, their interests expand and their capacity for learning is immense. Allowing a child to engage in the activities that she has chosen for herself shows her that she is trusted to know what she needs. That builds self-confidence in her, which gives her permission within herself to become fully immersed in her endeavor, and then move on to something else.

The school system attempts to push all children through subjects at the same pace. It does not seem to occur to them that each child is unique and should not be put into a mold that was formed by archaic notions. Some children are ready to read at age three while others, if allowed the freedom, have no interest in reading until they are in their late teens. When learning is not allowed to happen naturally, the result of forced learning is usually only temporary memorization. Memorization becomes a survival tool through twelve years of classes that bore most children, and focus more on conformity and discipline than on the joy of learning.

There will be varied lengths of time when a child appears to be doing nothing productive. If he is not nagged and coerced to do the things that her parents think she should be doing, she will use this time for self-discovery. Daydreaming and 'mindless' activities are more vital to the personal growth of children than doing repetitive schoolwork. Because of this, patience is the single most important quality for an unschooling parent to possess. Most parents have been trained to have rigid ideas about what a child should be doing at different levels. It's a challenge for some parents, but to unschool, they must realize that each child's intellectual evolution often has nothing to do with the prescribed school curriculum for his age.

Unschooling threatens people who are unsure about personal freedom. They are accustomed to living within a box that has been defined by their parents, teachers, peers and society. Stepping outside of that box takes courage and a willingness to effect a change in one's life. Relinquishing the power trip that is too often associated with parenting and giving a child freedom to learn at her own pace, will result in a myriad of benefits to both parents and children.

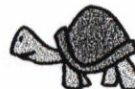
A child who has been unschooled becomes a strong, self-disciplined, self-motivated, and independent adult. She can move straight into adulthood, forgoing the need to work through the common pains of childhood inflicted on most children by controlling adults. She can progress more easily through life because of the atmosphere of approval and acceptance in which she was raised. When your actions are approved of by those you love most, your ability to grow and learn is multiplied ten-fold. Disapproval instigates defensiveness and eventually rebellion in most children. I am not simply repeating theories that I have read in John Holt's books; I am speaking from experience. My daughter, Laurie, is twenty-one years old and was unschooled all of her life. There were no demands placed on her, no one looking over her shoulder telling her to "do something," and no pressures to perform at her 'grade level.' She was free to do as she pleased, as long as it did not interfere

## THE BABY TURTLES SAVE THE DAY

By Sydney Packebush-Franko, age 4 (with a little help from Hailey)

Once upon a time there were three turtles and the mommy turtle got lost. The baby turtles walked around trying to find their mommy and they saw another turtle and thought it was their mommy, but it wasn't. The mommy turtle went into the woods and got even more lost and got stuck in a tree. And the baby turtles went in to the woods and found her and then they saved her.

When they got home the mommy said, "You turtles are so nice. You are going to be very nice and smart girls when you grow up." Then the mommy got sick and the baby turtles gave her lots of medicine and she got better. Then they were so happy they went out for dinner and lived happy ever after.



\*Sydney who just turned 4 loves her bird, Starbuck, and her guinea pigs, Ghosty and Hamster. She likes turtles too, but doesn't have one. Oh, and cats, and dogs and birds and rabbits and her dad likes dead mice...or say she says. Sydney helped write her bio.



## When Cats and Dogs Share

by Mallory Hobson



Once upon a time, there was a rat, a cat, and a dog. The rat was on a mat.

The cat said 'I will eat the rat'; the dog said 'I will eat the rat'.

The rat said 'No! No no no no!'

The cat said 'I will eat the rat'.

The dog said 'I will eat the rat'.

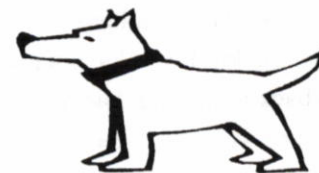
The cat said 'I said I wanted to eat the rat first!'

The dog said 'No, me first!'

So the cat and the dog had a fight, and then they decided to share the rat. They broke it in half and the cat got the top part and the dog ate up the bottom.

The end.

\*Mallory, aged 5, unschooler since birth. Writes, reads, draws, can identify a parasauroluphus fossil at 10 yards and has just danced in her first ballet production. She has no plans on joining the mainstream in her future.





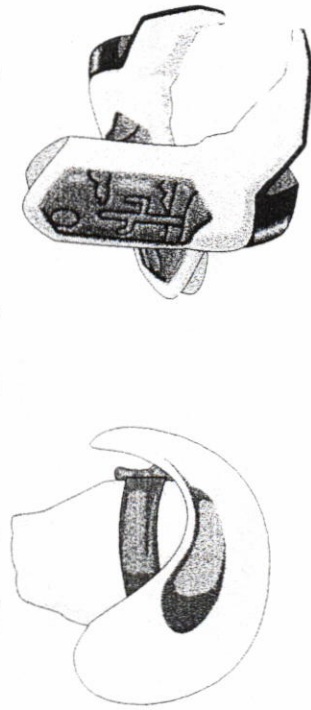
# Kids Page

## My Grandpa

By Hailey Packebush-Franko

Our grandpa says he kind of goofy. He says he is a great cowboy but he is really not. He says he is a secret agent too. What I find funny is that he lived in Washington his whole life and then he moves to Texas and he automatically is a cowboy, or so he says.

While we were stuck in Texas for the extra week we didn't do too much, but there was one thing that was pretty funny and amusing. My grandpa and my brother Jason got in a horse poop fight. It started when my brother threw a pecan at my grandpa. My grandpa thought it was a horse turd so my grandpa ran over and grabbed a handful of horse poop and hucked it at Jason. Jason chased my grandpa into the neighbor's yard so there was a huge fight in the neighbor's yard involving horse poop. It was pretty funny. When dinner was ready they came in and my step-grandma yelled at them to get outside and hose off and was furious at them that rest of the night. She said my grandpa needed to grow up. The rest of us thought it was hilarious.



Hailey Packebush-Franko is 12 years old. She likes animals & has lots of her own including: guinea pigs, rabbits, hermit crabs, fish, a cat, and of course a parrot named Taz. She likes to read, write, and pant. She is the editor of the Edgy-catin' kid's page.

with the rights of others. There were no enforced bedtimes, no time limits on the television or computer and no deadlines to be met. Laurie was allowed to be selfish, show her emotions and speak out if she felt she was treated unfairly. She was listened to and her opinions were just as valuable as her parents' opinions. If Laurie wanted to do nothing but 'play' on the computer for years (and she did), then no one was calling her 'lazy' and 'irresponsible.'

I imagine that if radical unschooling is a new concept to you, you are thinking that Laurie must be a selfish, spoiled and lazy brat. Nothing could be further from the truth. After eighteen years of total freedom to mature naturally and at her own pace, she decided that she wanted to attend college. She will graduate in December, with a 4.0 grade point average and is considering graduate work in law or sociology. Learning is her passion, and the way that she learns is unique from schooled people. She does not have a photographic memory, but she does retain most of the information that she hears without a need for repetition.

A college degree is not the definition of success, but if there is something that a person truly wants and a college degree is necessary to achieve that goal, then unschooling is not a hindrance to making that dream come true. For me, the definition of success is finding a life that makes you happy and content, and this happens much sooner for an unschooled child because she is accustomed to happiness and has found this to be a desirable way of life. She will do what is necessary to achieve her dreams.



Jason



## A HOMESCHOOLING FEMINIST?

Ann Peck Cowles

I am homeschooling my children. I am also a feminist. I am a homeschooling feminist! Wow! Who knew a person could be both! Certainly not me, and I've been a feminist for years. Actually, I believe I have been a feminist since childhood, although I never used the label until the early 1990s.

In 1992, as a non-traditional student on a small university campus, I found myself pulled to organizations promoting equality, freedom and choices. One might say I immersed myself in the feminist movement and they wouldn't be far from the truth. I joined the student chapter of NARAL and quickly catapulted to the position of student representative for the statewide board of directors. I joined the local chapter of NOW. I volunteered for the domestic violence coalition. I worked on political campaigns. As part of these groups, I organized events, participated in marches and handed out flyers. We helped women in need. We carried the message both in print and in action that women could be anything, do anything and that we all had the right to define and make the best choices for our own lives.

My activism continued after college. I gave up my rather secure position with benefits to become self-employed as an activist and grass roots organizer. I held leadership positions in groups from Women's Political Caucus and NOW, to even serving as Board President for the statewide NARAL organization. Every cause I worked with, every candidate I represented supported feminism and everything it stands for. My work didn't stop once my daughter was born. In fact, my resolve was even stronger.

My resolve was tested when my daughter, Hannah, was just two years old. My husband came home with the news that he had been offered a better job - in another state! We ended up moving to Minnesota, a supposed liberal's paradise, and I ended up becoming just one of many suburban housewives with nothing better to talk about than the weather and whose lawn was greener. I was miserable.

Hannah attended a Montessori school for two years, while I worked outside the home. When they informed us she would not be considered a kindergarten if she came back for a third year, we had a lot to sort out. As her parents, we knew she was ready for the next step. We also knew that a private school receiving \$5,000.00 per year in tuition, had no incentive to move her forward. We decided not to enroll her in a third year of Montessori. We were still deciding between public school and private school when someone mentioned homeschooling.

My very first exposure to the world of homeschooling was not through feminism (no big surprise here), but through the media more than 10 years ago. Homeschooling was portrayed as something done by religious conservatives, who were trying to avoid the so-called liberal teachings and questionable morals (their phrase, not mine) found in the public school system. I am embarrassed to admit that I accepted the media image and did no research into the homeschooling movement. No research, that is, until it was time to choose the educational path for my own daughter.

In all my research, I found nothing where women like me were homeschooling. Every example I found was of a family choosing to homeschool for religious reasons. In the books, in the media, even through the statewide organization. Okay, it was a Christian organization, but I didn't think it was such a stretch to expect to find a Christian, homeschooling feminist mama. Well, I didn't find one, but we decided to try homeschooling anyway.

Homeschooling kindergarten was fun. We played games, read books, created art masterpieces, took science classes and went on field trips. We also learned about life with the birth of our son, Reese. While the birth of Hannah had strengthened my resolve, homeschooling and the birth of my son brought it all back. I realized that I could no longer continue denying my need to participate in the feminist movement. I wanted to surround myself, once again, with strong women. Women who were committed to making our world a better place for our daughters AND our sons. I wanted to be around women and men who believed in equality, freedom and choices.

I was on a mission once again. This time it was a mission to unite feminism with homeschooling. I knew it could be done. And so did a lot of other women in my area. When there wasn't an inclusive group for us, we formed one. Every week we meet to play and learn. I gather more strength from every minute I spend with these incredible women. So yes, you can be a homeschooling feminist.

In Sisterhood,

Ann Peck Cowles

Homeschooling Feminist

## Meet the Writers...

Nina Packebush, that is me your humble Edgy-catin' Mama editor. I have spent the past 9 years homeschooling my three kids, ages 15, 12 and 4, while working part-time at a variety of jobs. I am married to a guy named Shawn. Our homeschool is made up of equal parts fun and chaos, but it works for us. My writing has appeared in such places as *Phillymama*, *Girl-mom*, *The YASH zine*, *The Companion Parrot Quarterly*, and *Motherload*.

Juleigh Howard-Hobson is a writer and homeschooling parent of three in Northern California. She writes a monthly column for "The Sacramento Homeschool Co-op" and is a regular contributor to such alternative parenting venues as *Phillymama.com*, *Hipmama* and *Motherload*. Between her husband, Dave, and herself, they actively pursue life as defined by the letter H-homebirthing, householding, homeschooling and hell raising. It makes for interesting dinner parties.

Gillian Callison is a writer who homeschools her three children and runs her own desktop publishing business. She is also a single-parent. In her spare time, she likes to explore the concept of sleeping.

Valerie Fitzmaurice is the mother of Laurie Chaney, a twenty-one year old college senior with a 4.0 grade point average, who was radically unschooled from birth. Valerie has written a book with the working title: *The Unprocessed Child: Living Without School* that tells about Laurie's life thus far. She is currently seeking a suitable publisher for her book. Please send any correspondence to: [theunprocessedchild@yahoo.com](mailto:theunprocessedchild@yahoo.com)

Ann Peck Cowles shares her life with her husband, Alan Peck Cowles and children Hannah and Reese Peck Cowles. She has a degree in business and a master's degree in mass communication. Besides being a homeschooling feminist mama, Ann is a public speaker, writer and consultant. She is also the co-owner, with her feminist husband, of [Homeschoolingfeminist.com](http://Homeschoolingfeminist.com). While still in development, the two expect to have their site up and running in early 2002. You may contact Ann, the homeschooling feminist, at [feministmschool@aol.com](mailto:feministmschool@aol.com).

Pamela Lortrick lives, works and learns in the rural mountains of Humboldt County, California with her husband Ian, children Lily and Henry, and an assortment of animals. She has created a website at [www.MamaNature.com](http://www.MamaNature.com)

Mary Lamken is an unschooling mom of 7. Her family began learning naturally about 9 years ago, when her two oldest children requested they be removed from the public school system. She has successfully launched her oldest child into the world of the United States Marines. She is currently studying for her Bachelors Degree in Natural Health through a distance learning program while exploring the world and learning through life with her husband and children.

And still more zines

Miranda

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## Of Teamwork and Poo-Poo

by Nina Packebush

I have three children, ages 15, 12 and 4. The most common question I get from new homeschoolers is: How do you homeschool older kids with a toddler in the house? Well, I have to tell you it all boils down to teamwork, patience and a great deal of organization....at least that is what I have heard. I will be writing many stories about how we pull it off, but first I would like to relay a story that took place when Sydney was 18 months old, Jason 13 year-old and Hailey 10 years old. This true story will warm your heart and lift your spirits and at the same time it will show you what homeschooling is all about....the love, the closeness, the teachable moments, the memories. I am also writing about this because this is one of my favorite parenting stories and well, it is my zine so I get to write about all the dysfunction that I want...whoohoo.

As you can imagine, in a homeschooling family the evenings are a time of calm, peacefulness and happy story times. My husband, Shawn, was working his sixth night in a row and I was home alone with my beautiful children. My mom and grandmother had left after joining us for dinner, and it was time to start getting the kids ready for bed. Sydney had nicked the end of her finger and was running around the house fussing and whining, "Rodney bit Nydney" over and over and OVER and OVER again (Rodney is our large African Grey Parrot.) Being a good and loving mommy I decided to distract her by giving her a warm and soothing bath.

Things were finally peaceful as she played happily in the soothing water. Suddenly she is standing at the edge of the tub holding on for dear life screaming, "POO-POO BUTT, POO-POO BUTT." Sure enough poo-poo was making a rapid decent from her butt and she is trying desperately to keep it in. She was terrified of poop. Always being there for my children, and realizing that there was no stopping the current unfolding of events, I rubbed her back and gently encouraged her to just go with the flow...so to speak. As the poo-poo fell into the water she began to shriek hysterically and jump around shaking, much like you or I would react to a tub full of writhing snakes. I removed her from the water, cleaned her up and took her to the kitchen where I fixed her a warm bowl of coconut jasmine rice with peaches because, as I have said before, I am a wonderful and caring mommy.

After she was settled at the table I went into the other room to clean up a bit. Seconds later she was again screaming, "POO-POO NYDNEY FOOT, POO-POO NYDNEY FOOT!" I picked up a few more things trying to delay my return to the kitchen while I breathed deeply and put on my happy mommy face. As I did this I told myself over and over again that she was just tired and cranky and way too young for Swiss boarding school. The screaming reached a fevered pitch as I returned to the kitchen only to find that she has had diarrhea all over her chair and feet. By the time I pick her up she is completely hysterical and has poo-poo all over her hand as well as her feet.

I carried her to the tub again, rinsed her off, put her in a diaper and fuzzy jamas and reassured her that the poo-poo was safely gone and would not hurt her. I got her snuggled on the couch with a blanket and book. As I returned to the kitchen to clean up the mess I couldn't help but notice that the poo-poo, a respectable amount, was gone and our dog Spot was cowering in the corner under the table looking extremely guilty. At this point I realized that family is all about teamwork so I called my oldest child, Jason, into the kitchen and turned the whole situation over to him. He then proceeded to call Hailey into the kitchen (remember it is all about teamwork). Hailey arrives in the kitchen and Jason immediately starts loudly vocalizing to Hailey (in our home we support self expression) that her dog was sick, disgusting and repulsive. The Third World War broke out soon after right there in my kitchen, which of course led us to a very educational discussion about the history of war. You just never know when those teachable moments will spring up.

Other cool zines -  
Deep South Mouth  
thisiscoleen@hotmail.com  
Motherload  
cable@efn.org

## Reading Circle

By Gillian Callison

The Reading Circle! Something I'd always wanted to do with my children. My vision was of me sitting in a chair with a book full of descriptive words and few illustrations. My children seated at my feet, looking up at me with singular focus on my every word. One could almost see the pictures they would be weaving in their minds as the story poured forth from my lips. That was one of my early desires. I wanted to read to my children as a group. Classics. Literature. Capturing their imaginations and set them on the path of appreciation of a wide variety of styles. That was the vision. Reality has a way of altering our visions rather dramatically.

My vision began with me selecting a book. My reality began with the first objection from my oldest son, Philip, at age 9. He didn't want THAT book, he would groan and mutter. With my vision still strong in my mind, I then selected several books and asked him to choose one. He still didn't like the choices, but grudgingly went along anyway. Reality continued to hit me in the face as my second oldest, Nolan, aged 7, was off in his own world, rolling around on the floor making incomprehensible noises. I tried to entice him into the story we were about to begin reading by describing it and making it sound exciting, but to no avail. I decided I could let go of having his rapt attention and settle for his presence. If he were quiet, perhaps as I read, he would get drawn into the story. My final piece of reality came in the form of my 4 year-old-daughter, McCallie. An independent soul, and a bit young for the book selected, I had lower expectations of her ability to stay with us. However, I had carefully calculated the timing of this reading event and thought that holding it right after a complete and filling lunch would have everyone low key and ready for a quiet activity. It didn't matter. She still just wanted food.

I began reading. Nolan continued rolling around on the floor, his incomprehensible noises escalating in volume. I encouraged him to quiet down, join us and to listen to this wonderful story I was trying to share with them all. He didn't even hear me. McCallie still wanted food and began edging her way toward the kitchen. I hadn't read very far before Nolan's volume increased again. By this time, Philip was interested in the story and was feeling frustrated by his brother's noise. I was trying hard to hold onto my vision as it was rapidly fading in light of reality. I gently reminded Nolan that he needed to be quiet in order to hear the story.

"I don't want to hear the story." He replied

Taking a deep breath and again employing my calm voice, I said, "Just be quiet and still and you might find that you like the story. It's really very good."

He quiets down a bit, but doesn't stop completely. By this time, McCallie has made her way into the kitchen and has opened the refrigerator. I reluctantly got up and herded her back into the living room. I began again. It doesn't take but a mere sentence of reading before Philip began complaining that he couldn't hear because Nolan was being too loud. I gently reminded Nolan again that he needed to be silent to hear the story. He lowered his volume. McCallie still wanted food. I continued reading. I stop again as the noise level increased yet again and used my best patient voice to bring down the volume so that Philip can hear the story. This pattern continued for about five minutes when I realized that I had only managed to cover about half a page. I sensed my patience wearing thin, but I persisted in my endeavor, convinced that if I just keep trying they would suddenly become mesmerized by the moment that was occurring and quiet down and listen.

My reminders for Nolan to be quiet and McCallie to wait for food became sterner and sterner. My voice started to have an edge on it. Philip's frustration at not being able to hear the story became very evident as he yelled at his siblings to "Shut up!" Remembering I'm the adult, I try to help Philip understand that he needs to use kind words. But, he learned those words somewhere, and it wasn't long before the source was uncovered as I finally gave into my frustration and yelled at my kids to "Shut up!" Finally, silence fills the room, but it was not the way I wanted to get silence. Everyone looked up at me.

I finally asked, "Okay, who wants to hear this story?" Philip was the only one to reply. "Alright then, you two please leave and find something else to do while I read for fifteen minutes to your brother, and then we'll all do something together."

Still shell-shocked from my bellow, Nolan and McCallie get up and leave the room. Philip and I continued reading the story for the allotted time, plus a little. Afterwards, I got up to see where the others have gone and what they have done.

And THAT is a story for another time.











The baby will join me, of course, and will pull all of the Band-Aids out of the Band-Aid box (we keep them there for these purposes, it transpires- the REAL medical supplies now line in un-kid-accessible shelves in the pantry, next to the scissors and my old girlsout knife)-ah! Now I can familiarize the baby with medical, and then anatomical terms, and concurrently teach him spatial concepts (such as IN and OUT of the box, BIG box, LITTLE Band-Aids).  
Amazing what you can do when you homeschool.



The  
Howard-Hobson Homeschool

Since I quit my "career" to stay home with my children, I have been interested in learning to build a web site and starting a small home business. The classes I found didn't work with my schedule or budget so I decided to figure it out on my own. I started from scratch, and taught myself as I went. The website was a work in process for months and I still add to it often. Starting an online business while living off the grid with two little ones in tow was a bit of a struggle. Keeping a one and a three year old entertained and out of trouble to focus on my work was not easy. Interruptions were much more of a challenge than when I lived in town. I could no longer just drop what I was doing and pick right back up later due to my limited alternative energy system. I had to shut everything down when I stopped working or my batteries would be quickly drained. But I am known to take on challenges, and I enjoyed this one. My website and business are now up and running in a small manageable scale. I could have been sitting in a classroom this whole time learning about theories of how to start a small internet business and build a website. Instead, I just did it. I am proudly doing it by myself and for myself.

I also enjoy writing but recently missed a writing class I was interested in. So, I just started writing on my own instead about things that interested me. I started in my journal, and then put together a few things for others to read. I was very pleasantly surprised when a regional magazine published the first thing I sent out. I know I still have much to learn, and certainly could benefit from a writing workshop or class, but the point is I was published on my own. Instead of being given assignments to write about, I just wrote about what I wanted to, and someone liked enough to print it. I did it on my own.

At thirty years old, with two young children, I am an adult unschooler. I am teaching myself and re-sparking a love of learning in the process. The power of self directed learning is amazing. It has really helped me think about education in a whole new way.

Of course I know that there are times when having a teacher or tutor can be the most helpful way for a person to learn something. Sometimes that we don't have the time or access to information we may need to learn something on our own. Sometimes it's just fun to take a class with other people. There is often much to be gained from another person's expertise if they are willing to share it. But to know that one doesn't necessarily need a teacher or a class to learn is priceless. It was like a light bulb going on in my head. I have new confidence in the ability to learn without being "taught" and it has definitely strengthened my feelings about an independent education at home for my children.

By Hailey



Hailey &  
Sydney



## How I Became an Adult Unschooler

By Pamela Jorrick

I first became interested in homeschooling when my daughter was born three years ago. To me, it was an intriguing idea. I've never been one to just blindly submit to the mainstream way of doing things along with the masses. Homeschooling questions what the rest of the world does. Being a fairly independent person, I wanted to learn more. The more I learned and thought about it, I knew that homeschooling was the way I wanted to educate my children. I was excited about all of the ideas and freedoms to pursue our own interests that could come with homeschooling. At the same time I realized just how boring so much of my own education had been.

I went through the full range of traditional schooling as a child. I attended private schools, public schools, and went on to college. I was on honor roles some years and in detention hall other years. School was certainly more about socializing than education for me. The highlight of being there was seeing my friends. I had a semester of "independent study" at home in high school. I loved the freedom of time that it gave me, even though the work was not the least bit stimulating.

I mostly did well in school, but seldom learned about anything that I was actually interested in or that was very useful in life. I memorized the information I was expected to, and was able to jump through the hoops to make the grade. I enjoyed art and writing because they allowed me some measure of freedom and creativity even though being creative on demand according to a clock is not easy. I hated history and science because the materials and methods were so boring. Names, dates, and dry facts with no practical meaning to me did not engage my interest in learning at all. Perhaps, if I had been able to study history from old diaries or a real person instead of a boring textbook or science by raising plants and animals, I may have been interested as a child as I am now. However, one teacher in a classroom with 30 children is too busy trying to maintain control to even attempt individualized lessons for her students.

When I was able to choose my own elective classes in school, I was much more interested, and consequently learned and retained more. Still, there was always someone else directing my learning. I always had a teacher passing on information of their choice to me. Occasionally, I would look into a subject further, but typically I was too busy with school and left with no time to learn anything more.

College was definitely an improvement for me in education. It allowed me much more freedom over my schedule and classes, but I was still the container being filled with bits of information decided by another person. Not much of the learning was done on my own.

Recently, I have had this revelation about learning and realized just how much knowledge I can gain entirely on my own. Having young children has kept me too busy to enroll in classes, so I stock up on books at the library and read after the kids are asleep. I learn about whatever interests me, and to the degree that it interests me. If I have a goal with a purpose, I will pursue it. If I come across a new idea, I can find out as much or as little about it as I choose.

Moving to the mountains for a simpler life with my family has provided me with so many opportunities for learning. Our electrical supply consists of 2 marine batteries and a 25 year old generator, so I quickly figured out ways of running our household with very little electricity (not easy for me being your average flip the switch and the light comes on American). Baking bread was the next self taught country skill because we love fresh bread, but not enough to drive an hour to town for it every day. Experimenting with flours and recipes is good messy fun for me and my daughter and we always grade ourselves based on our family taste tests. Gardening in an area with great soil but a host of garden pests from deer to poison oak is our current on going lesson. Armed with books and magazines, a shovel and seeds, we work at our living science lessons. I am sure it will take a few seasons before our efforts our apparent, but the fresh picked produce and the knowledge that we grew it ourselves will make it worth the effort.

Education is the process of living and not a preparation for future living. - John Dewey

## It is Time

by Nina Packebush

A few weeks ago my 12-year-old daughter and I were in the kitchen, she making soap and I making soup. Ani DiFranco played in the background. My 4-year-old sat at the table oblivious to the world, scooping mandarin oranges from a can and stuffing them into her mouth. The conversation inevitably turned to the events of September 11th, and as usual we found ourselves talking about the plight of the women and children in Afghanistan and the prospects of war... little did we know. I then asked my daughter a question I hadn't asked her before: "Do you think September 11th could have happened if women ran the world?" She was silent. Finally she said no but that women will never run the world so it doesn't really matter anyway. Sadly the way things look now there was a great deal of truth in her statement. I do hope, however, that in the lifetime of my great-granddaughters we may see women at least gaining true equality. By this I mean that women will be running 50% of all world governments, educational institutions, corporations and even finding equality in religion. Is that too much to ask? I hope not.

What if women ran half of all world governments, including the United States? Would there be a Taliban? Would our (the US) policies be those of compassion and tolerance rather than might and strong-arm tactics? Would we reach out to those in need without hesitation rather than asking ourselves, "What's in it for us?" Would a good portion of the world still think of us as The Great Satan? Would we use words, education, food and living wages to create unity rather than muscle, missiles, harsh words and hatred? Is this a goal that we can ever hope to reach? I think so.

The world is grossly out of balance right now. Half of the world has no power and no voice. When things are out of balance chaos takes over. If you doubt me then just take a good look around. I am not in any way saying that men are evil or bad, not at all. I am just saying that in all things there must be balance and we are so far out of balance right now that it is scary.

It wasn't so long ago that our First Wave sisters beat all of the odds and secured us the right to vote. They were hated, threatened and ridiculed but they fought. Then our Second Wave sisters came along and brought equal pay for equal work, living wages, reproductive freedom and the right to live free of violence to the forefront. We, Third Wavers, have never known a world without educational opportunities, reproductive freedom and at least a hope of making the same wage as men. But now it is our turn to declare a battle.

Yes, we need to continue the work of our Second Wave sisters but we also need to claim our own agenda. I say our greatest work should be in empowering our daughters to continue the fight, and to raise a generation of boys unlike any we have ever seen before. We saw a backlash against feminism in the 80's and we are now seeing another start. Just go to your local newsstand or bookstore and you will see *Sundered Wife*, *Cosmo Girl*, *YM*, and *Teen People*. We must make sure our daughters know that they are more than boobs, low cut jeans and pretty hair. We must show them that they are smart, powerful, beautiful and can make a difference. We must teach them that they can be lovers AND fighters.

We must teach our sons that girls and women are more than boobs, low-cut jeans and pretty hair. We must teach our sons that women are just as capable as men in a very real and concrete way. We must teach our sons to be nurturing, compassionate, and that words are more powerful than muscles.

As mothers we must educate our children. The public school system still teaches primarily white male history, as do most homeschoolers. It is time that we changed that. It is up to us to ensure that our children are fully educated. They must be as familiar with names like Elizabeth Cady-Stanton, Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Blackwell, Emma Goldman and Louisa May-Alcott as they are with names like Teddy Roosevelt, Abe Lincoln, George Washington and Thomas Edison. They must not only know who Martin Luther King Jr is but also Gloria Steinem. And they must see us working to make a difference. They must see us volunteering, donating money and time, educating ourselves and standing up to injustice. They must hear our voices loud and clear.

As homeschoolers we have a unique opportunity to empower our children through education. We have a chance to model balance and to dispell those gender stereotypes and biases that permeate our society. It is time for us to prepare our daughters and our sons for the next revolution; the revolution that will put the world on the path to peace through the leadership of educated, powerful, beautiful women and enlightened, caring and compassionate men. It is time we sought balance in this world. It is time for us to make sure September 11th never happens again.

Women may be the only group that grows more radical with age. -Gloria Steinem



Don't compromise yourself, you are all you've got. -Janis Joplin

## FOR THE LOVE OF LEECHES

By Nina Packebush

My oldest daughter, Hailey age 12, has always been fascinated by all things living. This has been apparent since the day she was born and is one of the main reasons we chose to homeschool her. Hailey is like me in many ways. I have always been entranced by nature and animals but as I hit junior high I was taught very quickly that girls weren't supposed to like things like that. Sure kittens, puppies, horses and bunnies were ok for girls to like, but stay away from reptiles, amphibians, insects and the like or you are doomed to a life as a social outcast. So we chose to homeschool Hailey to save her from this damaging gender stereotype, and as a result she is popular, confident and obsessed with animals of all types.

When she was 6 or 7 she became fascinated with slugs and snails. She kept snails as pets, learned about and handled slugs, slept with 2 large stuffed banana slug toys, and talked of nothing but gastropods. With a little research I was able to track down a professor at the University of Washington who happened to be a slug researcher, and a woman. I called her up and she was delighted with the prospect of meeting Hailey. She invited us to visit her lab for the day. It was wonderful. She showed Hailey several varieties of slugs that we didn't even know existed, including giant South American slugs. Hailey was allowed to sit in on a biology class in session. She told us how her research into slug slime had practical applications to both medicine and architecture. It was homeschooling at its finest.

Over the course of the next year and a half Hailey's interest in slugs and snails dwindled and she began to focus instead on guinea pigs and rabbits. We were able to arrange a year-long volunteer job for her at the House Rabbit Society (a rabbit and small animal rescue organization). Hailey's involvement in this led her to start her own little mini-rescue, which she still runs.

Time passed and Hailey began to become interested in chickens. I took a job at a farm animal rescue organization and Hailey was able to come along each day as a volunteer. She spent a year working 5 days per week, 2 to 4 hours a day, caring for the various farm animals. She became the primary caretaker of over 300 chickens and was an active volunteer in the rescue of over 1000 chickens, the largest animal rescue operation ever in the United States (more on this in a future issue).

The job ended and Hailey was in search of a new interest. She found it one day while visiting my cousin's family. We were enjoying the day at their lake when Hailey stumbled upon a leech. She scooped it up into a butter container and ran to show us. Of course, three grown adults reacted by screaming at her to get away, all of us convinced that the leech would somehow hurt itself from the butter container onto one of our faces. She grudgingly returned the leech to its rightful home and spent the rest of the afternoon trolling for more.

After that day leeches were pretty much forgotten until a few weeks ago. Here in Washington fall brings the running of the salmon. For those of you unfamiliar with the salmon life cycle it goes like this: salmon hatch in the spring, grow up in the river, reach adulthood and head to the ocean, live as salt water fish for 3 to 5 years and then return once again to the exact spot of their hatching to lay or fertilize eggs, once the eggs are laid and fertilized the salmon then die.

We live nestled in the Y where two rivers meet, so salmon are a normal part of our homeschooling life. Each year we trudge down to the river to watch this fascinating natural event. This year the salmon run was unbelievable. Thousand upon thousands of salmon made their way into our rivers. You could literally reach out and scoop them up. The water was alive. But the salmon do die soon after spawning, so in a matter of weeks the riverbanks were covered in dead salmon, thousands of them as far as the eye could see.

Right before this sank in, I blundered into a grouch-fest about kid junk with some mothers I know. They were all hanging around the local food co-op, moaning and groaning about messy houses, about toys on the floor, about crap here and more crap there and, without even thinking twice-I did it. I joined in. I bemoaned the sheer amount of stuff that I deal with on a daily basis: the blocks, pens, markers, paper, baskets, robotic pets, cat kibbles, paint brushes, books, plastic pirates, dinosaurs, farm animals, medical play kits, doll dishes, kid dishes, crumbs, notepads, balls, trucks, flowers, mud, guides to insects, empty toilet paper rolls and goddess-knows what else I find on my floor or my furniture, day in day out and, you know what? I didn't get cut off!

This time I got dismissed.

"Well you're homeschooling".

Strutlike three: I'm outta there.

Yes. I homeschool. I chose to do it.

I think it's amazing.

Even so, I reserve my right to complain when the amazing 5 year old hits the amazing 3 year old with the plastic apatasaurus. I reserve the right to vent if you ask me how it's going and the amazing baby just dumped the entire box of Brito construction pieces on the parlor floor and is now dancing [albeit, in an amazing way] on all 6 million of them. I reserve the right to yell, grouch and be annoyed when some-amazing-body marks the back of the couch with a gel pen even if I had just taken them to the museum of modern art.

I may homeschool, I may even unschool-but I sure as heck don't live in Nirvana, not by a long shot. Welcome to my neighborhood and, to paraphrase Mamie Eisenhower -if you don't have anything nice to say, well come on over and talk to me.

I'll swap two vents for a good spleen-letting anyday!



Jason



## Two Vents and a Spleen Letting

By Juleigh Howard-Hobson

Homeschooling parents are not allowed to complain. Have you noticed this? We, by some unwritten [but universally agreed upon] rule of conduct, have-by the fact we voluntarily decided to homeschool-- irreversibly abdicated our right to find fault with any of the infinite varieties of dissatisfaction that crop up in the course of parenthood.

Yep, we are held to a higher standard. We are models of endurance, blessed with patience, greater insights, motivation and energy, possessing a distinct lack of needed personal space/time/pursuits and hip to a million and one ways to keep going/maintain order/be resourceful and stop the baby from eating the glue sticks.

I didn't know this, at first.

Nope, when I signed on to this homeschooling gig I thought I could be just a regular 'Joe' (okay, 'Josephine'). You know, the kind of person who can say things like "They are driving me up the wall!" or maybe utter a few choice "I need a few moments to myself!" here and there. It seemed only reasonable, especially as the kids do drive me nuts (on a daily basis) and I can always use a few moments to myself (I say 'always' because I never do get them...)

Nobody told me that I was now part of the greater union of the disenfranchised grouseers. Honest.

So, there I was. I had my homeschooling-parent uniform on (jeans, t-shirt and tired sneakers); I had the regulation kids (in my case, three), of various ages and abilities all clamoring for attention at once. I had the standard sink of dishes waiting to be done and the laundry basket in the spare room full of either clean (to be put away) or dirty (to be sorted) clothing. I had Elmer's glue on the table, a book about pirates on the floor and the notion that today we might do something like make home made pizza, typical homeschooling scenario.

The only thing that separated me from all the other homeschooling parents in the USA that morning was this: I didn't know I wasn't supposed to complain about it. I figured, seeing as it was only 9 am and I already felt like I wanted to run away to Prague and put them all in boarding schools, that it was pretty perky of me to just say, [to my mother in law who called and asked how it was going]: "AGH!!!!!!!!!!!" I did explain that comment, I continued: "I am being driven insane - I have so much to get done this morning and they keep dropping 'Play Dough' on the floor, where the baby sucks on it, then they..."

I got cut off. I mean, I GOT CUT OFF.

A few weeks later I was talking with a few moms I meet up with for park days and such, now granted these moms are NOT homeschool moms, but they have younger kids and they are 'stay-at-homers' so sometimes we hang out. Anyway, there I was-the kids were digging, we were perched on the concrete edge of the sand area, the talk turned to the trendy haircuts both moms sported, and how difficult it often was for them to schedule those 6 week hair maintenance appointments with their kids underfoot (I know, it makes your heart just bleed, doesn't it?). I threw out that I wished I had time to bleach my hair again and keep it root-free like I used to when [don't you know] I was cut off mid-sentence again--

"Well, you're homeschooling, Hon. get used to it," said one of them.

Okay, by now I was getting the idea. I was not going to get any quarter in society when it came to the complaint dept., was I?

As Hailey walked among them she suddenly remembered a long ago trip to the local salmon hatchery where the worker described the leeches that inhabit the salmon. Minutes later armed with rubber gloves, tweezers and a jar Hailey was peering under the gills of dead salmon in search of her desired treasure. She managed to find 2 small leeches to bring home. She kept them on the front porch for observation. So each day after she fed her bird, land crabs, fish, the rabbits and the guinea pigs she would head out to the porch to observe the leeches. They really are fascinating creatures... from a distance, that is.

Although leeches are not at the top of my list of favorite homeschooling projects, Hailey is learning and having fun. Hailey has plenty of friends, both public school kids and homeschooled kids, who at first thought she was "sick, gross and weird" but these same kids are now kneeling down to watch the leeches move about their temporary home. Hailey is able to show them that girls can like nail polish, clothes AND leeches. Maybe Hailey's strong sense of self, her confidence, openness and her love of the sometimes strange and often times gross, are what make her so popular. Whatever it is, Hailey is pulling it off and showing other young girls that they can do it too. And for this family that is what homeschooling is all about.

I am just thankful that there is no such thing as A National Leech Rescue Organization.



A lovely day looking for lake leeches.



# The Renaissance Princess, Evil Butterfly and Devil Ducky Meet the Homeschooling

## Community

By Nina Puckbrush

We are not Christian homeschoolers. We are not Satanist homeschoolers. We are not really religious at all (ok we kind of lean to the Pagan side of life but still we don't claim any sort of religion as our own). We homeschool for many reasons. We homeschool because my son is dyslexic. We homeschool because I am a feminist and want my girls to have a childhood free from societal gender stereotypes. We homeschool because my kids want to homeschool. We homeschool because it is fun. We homeschool because I want the kids to be free to be who they are without any pressure to conform. We do not homeschool because of any sort of religious beliefs.

As homeschoolers we have many friends and acquaintances that are of one religion or another. With them religion is something we mutually agree to not discuss, but lately this is becoming more and more difficult.

I am a big supporter of letting my kids be who they are. I believe in letting them express themselves as they see fit, be it funky hair, strange clothes, crappy music, or whatever. My 4 year old has really taken this to heart. Each and every day she wears her old Renaissance Princess Halloween costume. This thing is tattered, torn, stained and, despite regular washings, smells bad. It is a two-tone purple, nylon dress with gold trim and arm flaps. She has one of those ring things to wear on her head with the loop of fabric that goes under her chin and a strip of fabric hanging off of each side. She thinks she is gorgeous.

This really wouldn't be so bad except whenever she is a Renaissance princess, which is 23.5 hours a day (she does bathe for .5 hours each day), she has to carry around her two favorite toys; a red monarch butterfly hand puppet named Duck and a glow in the dark rubber ducky with evil eyes and two little red devil horns. The duck's name, of course, is Devil Ducky.

Duck (the butterfly) is apparently an evil butterfly. We are not sure how this came about or how a 4 year old knows what the word evil means (yes we did check her scalp for the telltale 666 and it was clean) but Duck is evil all the same. Duck aka Evil Butterfly, as she is more commonly known, 'tacks people who are mean'. Duck has 'tacked' many people in her short life. Just about every friend and family member that Sydney knows has experienced the wrath of Duck. Duck never hurts anyone. She just lets out a low growl, Sydney tells the person that "Evil Butterfly is getting mad" and then Duck lunges out and pokes the person gently in the leg. Most people find it amusing, if not a wee bit strange.

Then there is Devil Ducky. I take full responsibility for little Devil Ducky. You see, Sydney has always loved ducks. She has all of the Daisy Duck books, Daisy and Mama duck stuffed animals, she has several rubber duckies and various stuffed duckies, so when I was at Archie Mephees (a strange little store of popular culture oddities in Seattle) and saw the little devil ducky I just had to buy it for Syd (and two for myself). Sydney fell instantly in love with Devil Ducky's evil little eyes, cute red horns and the fact that she glowed in the dark. Devil Ducky instantly became one of her favorite toys. Luckily Devil Ducky rarely 'tacks' people and gets along splendidly with Evil Butterfly.

So here we are with the local homeschoolers, many, if not most, of them are homeschooling for strictly religious reasons, and Sydney is dressed up as a grubby Renaissance princess with her devil ducky and evil butterfly looking cute as can be. The pious mommies come up to comment on Syd's gorgeous head of blond curls and she immediately launches into her spiel about Evil Butterfly. She boldly tells them, "Evil Butterfly 'tacks people who are mean, but don't worry she won't tack you unless you are mean. Are you mean?" Devil Ducky is nice though, she won't tack you. "This is usually followed by nervous smiles and an uncomfortable silence. I don't even bother to explain or make excuses. If the mama laughs and plays along I know she is my kind of mama. If she grabs her children to her bosom and runs away I know that the relationship was doomed from the start.

Now as far as non-homeschoolers go, well they either laugh hysterically or shake their head in dismay wondering how such a whacked-out mother could possibly be allowed to educate her own children.

Do I wonder if Sydney needs psychological help or maybe a good exorcism? Nah. Sydney is just a strange little kid who is allowed to revel in her weirdness. I am sure she will grow up to be some ultra-conservative, Republican, religious leader of some sort...or not. Either way I think she will be fine. In the meantime we are having some fun shaking things up in the, often way too serious, homeschooling community.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world, indeed it's the only thing that ever has. - Margaret Mead



The Princess

